

# Psychology



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Can Our Memory Be Trusted? We would like to believe that we were always clear with our recollection, but this 60 Minutes story proves just how wrong we can be when we are trying our best to be right. Jennifer Thompson was violated, and had the presence of mind to try to capture every detail of her attacker so she could bring him to justice. Because she was so adamant, she took extra time examining him, but when it came to looking at the pictures, she chose someone who bore the closest resemblance to the man who raped her. I don't believe that she was lying at all when she fingered the wrong man for the crime. For her, it was Mr. Cotton who raped her and she believed that with all of her conviction. Our schema is such that once we think something, that memory has a tendency to remain unchanged. Jennifer made her choice, and in the subsequent trial, was so sure Mr. Cotton was the rapist that she exhibited physiological symptoms that further accentuated her belief that he was the one. I believe that Mr. Cotton was wrongly accused as well because his face was one from which Jennifer got to choose. As our schema influences what we look for in any given situation, Mr. Cotton just having a mug shot for her to look at must mean he was a criminal and therefore the one who attacked her. This only furthered her belief that he was the right choice. I think this story shows that no matter how hard we try to get it right, our brain may have different ideas. We have a preconceived idea of how things should work and how things interact with each other in our world, and once we make a decision, we tend to believe in it, no matter who tries to change our mind. Unfortunately for Mr. Cotton, the jury having been told that Jennifer had positively identified him as her attacker was a further nail in his coffin. They believed that she hadn't made any mistakes, and so their memory when they got back to the jury room was that he must

be the one, he was identified as such. Not only did Jennifer have preconceived notions of her own, but she led others to believe that she was right in her choice, hence shaping their belief in his guilt. Thankfully he was vindicated, but it goes to show us that our memories alone can't be taken as absolute fact; there is way more to it than just remembering a scenario, no matter how hard you try to remember it correctly.